

## **Consumption of Alcohol in the context of Parishes, Churches, Congregations and Fellowships in the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney**

(A report on behalf of the Standing Committee.)

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### **1. Preamble**

The Anglican Church in the Diocese of Sydney has identified a Diocesan Mission –

To glorify God by proclaiming our saviour the Lord  
Jesus Christ in prayerful dependence on the Holy  
Spirit, so that everyone will hear his call to repent, trust  
and serve Christ in love, and be established in the  
fellowship of his disciples while they await his return.

As part of this Mission the Diocese is concerned to encourage appropriate behaviour among the members of our parishes, churches, congregations and fellowships: behaviour that reflects the truths of Scripture and demonstrates the love and concern for one-another and for the non-believer that was central to the ministry of Jesus and hence the gospel we seek to promote. One of these areas of behaviour is the consumption of alcohol.

It is an unfortunate fact that alcohol is widely misused in our society. Governments are now recognising what the church has been aware of for decades - that the misuse of alcohol is the cause of many other problems. Individuals and the community are impacted in terms of

serious illness, injury, social violence, broken relationships, and financial cost.

From time to time the Diocese has given public expression to its concerns about the misuse of alcohol in the wider community. In the period up until the end of the Second World War, one of the distinguishing marks of Evangelical Christians was their total abstinence from alcohol. This position was commended to both church members and the general populace and was reflected in the use of church property. Alcohol consumption was banned except for its use in the Lord's Supper. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the practice of total abstinence is far less common now among Christians at both the individual and communal level than once was the case.

For many years the Standing Committee has had a policy that alcohol should not be consumed on church trust property, except in the service of the Lord's Supper, and on certain particular properties where the lessee has a licence to sell alcohol. This policy is reflected in the 'social covenants' governing the leasing and licensing of church trust property. However, in November 2007 the Standing Committee resolved that the 'social covenants' are intended to apply only to church trust property that is being leased, and the following month passed an ordinance to confirm that position. Accordingly, after a brief policy debate the Standing Committee also requested the preparation of a draft statement of policy covering on the consumption of alcohol at church events and at private activities on church trust property.

In passing resolution 36/08 the Synod –

- (a) noted the right of adult persons to enjoy alcohol in moderation,
- (b) regretted the increasing practice of binge drinking, the scourge of alcohol-fuelled violence and property damage, the knock-on effects of alcohol abuse, the carnage on our roads often caused by drunk drivers, the prevalence of alcohol-led physical assaults, and the practice of specifically targeting teenagers in some advertising of alcohol campaigns,
- (c) applauded the recently reported plans for the NSW Cabinet to consider a range of drinking laws designed to address the problems brought on by alcohol abuse,
- (d) requested the Archbishop to write to the Premier, Leader of the Opposition and Police Commissioner to encourage them to pursue this matter vigorously and to assure them of our support as they do so,
- (e) recalled the biblical teaching that everything God created is good, that drunkenness is always to be avoided, that civil rulers and church leaders must take special care in

- any consumption of alcohol, and that Christians should avoid causing others to stumble by what they drink,
- (f) noted section 6 of our code of conduct *Faithfulness in Service* in relation to the consumption of alcohol, and
  - (g) therefore encouraged Christian pastors and other leaders and teachers to proclaim scriptural truths concerning the use of alcohol and to set a godly example in regards to any personal use of alcohol and further encouraged Christian pastors to take time to understand alcohol addiction which afflicts many in our congregations such that they can show compassion and pastoral care to Christians struggling to overcome this addiction.

At its meeting in February 2009, the Standing Committee considered a draft policy prepared by a committee appointed by the Archbishop and resolved to bring the proposed policy to the Synod. Standing Committee also requested that before the matter came to Synod a copy of the draft policy and an alternative policy be sent to each parish council and Synod representative for consideration and comment. Comment was also sought from the diocesan insurance brokers and a number of reputable health institutes which deal with alcohol and the community.

The comments which flowed back from parish councils and Synod members were substantial in number, extremely helpful and have been taken into careful consideration in re-framing the draft policy into the form presented in this report.

## **2. Objectives**

This report aims to –

- Acknowledge our responsibility to behave in a way that promotes the gospel, encourages ‘safe’ communities and models Christian love.
- Identify the particular circumstances, manner and controls under which it is, or is not, appropriate for alcohol to be available in the context of church activities and church trust property.
- Produce positive, educative guidelines and resource material to assist the clergy and lay leaders, parents, youth leaders and all members of our churches to make responsible decisions in relation to the use of alcohol.

### **3. Theological perspectives – a précis<sup>1</sup>**

The Scriptures condemn drunkenness and portray in a disparaging manner many of the effects associated with the consumption of what we would term alcoholic drinks. Though they indicate that there are dangers associated with the drinking of alcoholic beverages, they give no overriding command from God to abstain from them. In some texts the beverage is fermented, in other cases it is unclear whether it is fermented or not. There are instances where the effects of consuming the beverage are portrayed in a favourable light and it is difficult to argue that the beverage must have been unfermented.

Out of concern for the believer, with respect to alcoholic consumption, appeal is often made to what is termed “the weaker brother principle.” The texts commonly referred to are those of Romans 14:1–15:6 and 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. The former text relates to different attitudes towards the eating or drinking of certain substances. The latter relates specifically to the consumption of food that has been offered to idols. In both situations, matters of grave concern are at stake, namely the faith of the believer and the believer’s possible destruction. Whatever the limits to the strict applicability of these texts, underlying the arguments of both passages is the requirement under God is to act out of love towards a fellow believer and not to place one’s own beliefs or inclinations above the welfare of other members of the household of God.

In 1 Corinthians 10:27–11:1 Paul exhibits the same type of concern for the unbeliever. The situation addressed is where an unbeliever invites a believer to a meal but it is soon revealed that some of the food has been offered to idols. Paul’s position is that the believer, now knowing the origin of the food, for the sake of the “conscience” of others, and possibly unbelievers are predominantly in mind, should desist from eating it. One could argue from this passage that if an unbeliever’s understanding of the faith is in serious jeopardy, as a consequence of certain behaviour of a believer, be it the consumption of alcohol in a specific situation or some other action, then that behaviour is to be abandoned. However, where it is judged that a serious misunderstanding of the faith by an unbeliever is unlikely to occur then the passage would not strictly apply. What would always be of concern however is having a sincere longing for God’s salvation of the unbeliever. In certain circumstances, this might mean abstention from consuming alcoholic drinks. In other cases such an abstention might be unhelpful for unbelievers and even mislead them in their understanding of the faith. The relevance of Paul’s strategy of becoming all things to all men should be considered. Furthermore, the Scriptures warn us of any behaviour that might be rightly judged by the

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<sup>1</sup> For the full text see the Appendix entitled: “To drink or not to drink: having others in mind” a biblical perspective.

unbelieving world to be inappropriate. Believers must be concerned about how the public perceive their behaviour. Certainly, whether believers or unbelievers are in mind, we are also under obligation to love those suffering from the effects of alcohol and with that same love we are to endeavour to reduce and not increase such suffering.

There is a freedom that the believer enjoys because of the work of Christ. It incorporates a freedom from slavery to sin and its consequences. There is also a freedom from being constrained by human regulations, though the believer must not appeal to any such freedom as an excuse for sinful behaviour. Furthermore, the believers' freedom from human regulations is not to be made the basis of their actions. Rather, the rule is that one should act as a slave towards unbelievers in order that they might be saved and as a slave towards fellow believers that they might grow and develop under God.

#### **4. Use of alcohol in the Australian community**

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and other research institutes provide ample evidence that the inappropriate use of alcohol is a serious and growing problem in our community.

Alcohol is a depressant drug. The World Health Organisation (WHO) offered this assessment in 2004 –

“In low quantities it causes people to become less inhibited, in higher doses it can cause unconsciousness and even death. It is thought that low to moderate alcohol consumption may offer some protective health effects. However high alcohol consumption increases the risk of heart, stroke and vascular diseases, liver cirrhosis and some cancers. It also contributes to disability and death through accidents, violence, suicide and homicide.”

The WHO lists Australia as number 22 in world per capita alcohol consumption.

A diocesan policy relating to alcohol consumption needs to be informed by research on alcohol consumption in Australia with its consequent effect on the Australian population.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) issued the report *Alcohol Consumption in Australia: A Snapshot 2004-05*. It stated that over the last three National Health Surveys the proportion of people drinking at a risky/high risk level increased from 8.2% in 1995 to 10.8% in 2001 and 13.4% in 2004-5. This ABS research reveals that in 2004-05 –

- 15% of adult males and 12% of adult females reported drinking at the risky/high risk level.
- 55% of males and 43% of females reported drinking at a low risk level.

- The increase of drinking at a risky/high risk level has been greater for women.

Drinking at or above risky/high risk levels in the short term, that is, on any single occasion, is sometimes referred to as 'binge drinking'. Data from the 2004-05 National Health Survey (NHS) shows that among people aged 18 years and over, 48% of males and 30% of females consumed alcohol at risky/high risk levels in the short term on at least one occasion in the last twelve months. These figures are comparable with data from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey which show that in 2004, among people aged 14 years and over, 40% of males and 31% of females consumed alcohol at risky/high risk levels in the short term.

According to the 2004-05 NHS among people aged 18 years and over, 12% of males and 4% of females had consumed alcohol at risky/high risk levels in the short term at least once a week over the previous twelve months. Of these young people aged 12-24 years were most likely to drink at this risk level. About one in five males (19%) and one in ten females (11%) in this age group had consumed alcohol at risky/high risk levels in the short term at least once a week in the previous 12 months.

Some lifestyle related health risk factors can be associated with risky/high risk level of drinking. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) confirms that the effects of alcohol are often worsened by other risk factors, such as smoking and dietary factors.

Drinking heavily over a long period of time can cause harm to a person's brain and liver functioning and contribute to depression, relationship difficulties and hence quality of life. It can also increase the risk of developing cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, cognitive problems, dementia and addiction (NHMRC).

The Cancer Institute NSW released the report *Alcohol as a Cause of Cancer* on May 8, 2008. It contains some disturbing data concerning the carcinogenic effects of alcohol consumption, in particular –

- Four standard alcoholic drinks per day increases a man's risk of developing bowel cancer by 64%.
- Two standard drinks per day for women increases their risk of developing breast cancer by up to 22%.
- 12% of all breast cancer cases in NSW can be directly linked to excessive consumption of alcohol.
- Two standard drinks per day for both men and women increases the risk of developing mouth cancer by 75%.

When the report was released, Professor Jim Bishop, head of the Cancer Institute NSW said that about one third of all cancers were

preventable and cutting down on alcohol must be part of any cancer-prevention strategy.

Alcohol is the second largest cause of drug-related deaths and hospitalisations in Australia, after tobacco (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare). Alcohol is the main cause of deaths on Australian roads. The estimated economic cost of alcohol misuse to the Australian community in 1998-99 totalled \$7.6 billion. This includes associated factors such as crime and violence, treatment costs, loss of productivity and premature death (Collins and Lapsley; 2002).

### **5. The social impact of alcohol**

The core issues relating to alcohol consumption are issues of culture, pleasure and identity.

“The search for pleasure and the pursuit of playful enjoyment and hedonism generally I think plays a much greater role in young people’s lives today than it did previously. And this is partly the phenomenon of the period of extended adolescence, that they’re simply in an environment with the facilities and the resources to party hard and play longer than they have been able to do previously. And so alcohol then becomes a crucial and central part of that sort of hedonistic lifestyle.”  
(Professor Ann Roche, Director of the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, Flinders University Adelaide)

Alcohol can serve many functions. Reasons for drinking can vary from culture to culture, person to person and occasion to occasion. No single factor alone is sufficient to explain drinking, but it is useful to consider some of the important factors. For example, alcohol might be consumed for –

- Socio-cultural reasons (to celebrate, commiserate or to cement an agreement);
- Self-medication (to help them sleep, to deal with anxiety or stress; to build self-confidence);
- Social acceptance (to feel part of the crowd; to gain peer acceptance);
- The taste and symbolism of the drink.

Some people are more vulnerable to develop alcohol problems. These include people who live in a heavy drinking community or culture, people who have other significant problems in their lives (e.g. mental health problems; people recovering from trauma; people who live in socially and economically deprived environments) and people who have a familial history of alcohol dependence. However, for young people, who are drinking more and with more dangerous outcomes than in previous generations, often the reasons are peer pressure and

cultural expectations (that is, everyone does it). For that reason the Australian Government Guidelines (*Alcohol and Your Health* – Department of Health and Ageing: Commonwealth of Australia, 2006) say that young people should be supported in their decision not to drink.

The majority in our society would probably agree with the Bible's clear teaching that drunkenness and certain behaviours associated with the consumption of alcohol are inappropriate. On the other hand, our society values alcohol when used appropriately and the Bible certainly does not contain a general prohibition against its use.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people who consume alcohol believe they do so in a way that does not harm themselves or others. However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported that over the 10 years to 2005 the proportion of people drinking at a risky or high risk level has increased significantly.

Governments are obviously in the difficult position of having to balance competing interests on this issue – on the one hand a significant part of their revenue comes from taxes from the sale of alcohol, on the other they recognise the heavy social cost of alcohol abuse. To their credit both the Australian and NSW governments have developed policies and resources aimed at delineating what levels of harm are associated with alcohol abuse, and to develop appropriate harm minimisation strategies. In general these policies reflect concerns about the adverse health effects of alcohol for certain vulnerable people and particular social practices, while retaining space for individual freedom.

A variety of risk factors influence the experience of alcohol related harm. There are things to do with the individual (their health; their age) things to do with the drug (the amount of alcohol consumed; how quickly it is consumed) and things to do with the environment (drinking at home with a meal is less risky than drinking quickly before driving a car). The context of drinking is also important. For example, some licensed venues have been identified as "hot spots" which account for a disproportionate amount of alcohol-related violence attended by police. Particular times of day are riskier than others. Young people, particularly in the age range of 18-29 are among the heaviest drinkers. While historically young men have been the heavier drinkers, there is evidence that young women are catching up with, and in some cases overtaking young men, in terms of drinking at risky levels. How we make alcohol available seems to matter. Hours of sale, who we sell to (e.g. their age and their state of intoxication) number and type of alcohol outlets all seem to have influence. What parents do also seems to matter. Some family factors (e.g. connectedness, communication, clear rules about alcohol consumption) reduce risk while other factors (e.g. poor communication, family disharmony and conflict, permissiveness about alcohol) increase risk. The degree of young

people's connectedness to school, to community and to adults can influence the risk of a range of problems, including risky alcohol consumption.

The NSW Government is attempting to deal with each "hot spot" using the most targeted, appropriate means. The overall effect, the Government hopes, will be to "change the culture of alcohol use in NSW" (the Social Issues Executive *Consumption of Alcohol: Report to Standing Committee*, 10 February 2007).

Australian Government Guidelines (*Alcohol and Your Health* – Department of Health and Ageing: Commonwealth of Australia, 2006) echo NSW Government policy, and outline the kinds of expectations now enjoined upon people in every setting where alcohol is found –

When responsible for private and public drinking settings –

- actively promote responsible drinking;
- try to make sure that people being served alcohol do not become intoxicated;
- suggest (and provide) alternative drinks to alcohol;
- refuse to serve alcohol to people who are intoxicated;
- look for ways to reduce possible causes of harm in the setting; and
- closely supervise or monitor young people.

Harms from alcohol misuse can occur in, and be caused by situations in licensed venues or private homes. This Guideline applies to any setting where alcohol is served, including –

- private homes and parties, workplaces (for social functions); and
- any public setting (hotels and bars, clubs, public events, planes, etc).

Effective ways you can help to reduce health risks include –

- provide non-alcoholic and low alcohol drinks;
- encourage people to alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks;
- make food available;
- provide safe transport from the venue;

- staff training in the responsible service of alcohol;
- monitor young people; and
- ensure the setting is safe – for example ensure the area is well lit with no slippery floors.

The views of other protestant churches in relation to alcohol vary –

The Baptist Union of NSW –

each church is autonomous but there remains strong general opposition to the consumption of alcohol on church premises, although the practice of abstinence has largely lapsed.

The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (NSW) –

there is no formal set of guidelines but it is generally accepted that no alcohol is allowed on church premises.

The Fellowship of Congregational Churches, NSW –

there are no specific guidelines on the subject.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia (NSW) –

there are no formal regulations on the subject.

The Salvation Army (Eastern Territory) –

all Officers and Soldiers are required to abstain and no alcohol would be served at any event or on any church property.

Uniting Churches –

there appears to be no guidelines although some congregations still adhere to traditional temperance views.

Roman Catholics –

there appears to be no guidelines in place for congregations.

## **6. Legal considerations**

The following information has been provided by the Diocesan Legal Officer.

There is at law an absolute prohibition of the provision of alcohol to minors (i.e. persons under 18 years of age).

Where a parish holds a function or ministry event and alcohol will be sold, a type of liquor licence called a temporary function licence will be required. The term 'sell' is interpreted rather widely. If a parish holds a function for which tickets are sold and the cost of the ticket will cover a meal and alcohol, this will constitute the sale of alcohol for licensing

purposes. For liquor licensing purposes, it does not matter where the function is held. If there is a function where alcohol is being sold in some form (whether it be on the night from a "bar" or via a ticket which is inclusive of alcohol) a temporary function licence will be required, unless the premises are already licensed (e.g. a hotel ballroom). A temporary function licence will be required irrespective of whether the function is held in a school, church hall or other premises.

Whether the parish would need a temporary function licence or not depends on whether the alcohol would be 'sold' or provided free of charge. Generally if a function is by invitation only and alcohol is being served free of charge, a liquor licence would not be required. No licence is required for a function where people bring their own liquor.

A temporary function licence may be granted to a bona fide non-profit organisation that has a constitution, rules or other law that governs its activities and the function directly promotes specific objects or purposes of the organisation. This licence allows liquor to be sold at up to 3 functions in a 12 month period.

Conditions attached to a temporary function licence require –

- Every person supplying liquor at the function must hold a Responsible Service of Alcohol certificate.
- The licensee must ensure compliance with a cluster of harm minimisation strategies.

The Information Sheet found on the NSW Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing website specifies the requirements a licensee must meet to be granted a temporary function licence.

The licensee (in this case the parish) must have the will, experience and organisational ability to ensure alcohol is only served in the manner stipulated by the licensing laws.

## **7. Church law and protocols**

For clergy and church workers the standards contained in *Faithfulness in Service*, state –

- 6.5 You are to be responsible in your use of alcohol and other mind altering or addictive substances or services.
- 6.6 You are not to undertake any pastoral ministry when you are impaired by alcohol or any other mind-altering or addictive substances.

and the guidelines then go on to say –

- 6.16 Monitor your consumption or use of alcohol and other mind altering or addictive substances or product (e.g. gambling) to ensure your wellbeing and that of others. Seek professional help if the

use of these substances or products adversely affects your ministry, personal wellbeing or relationships.

For clergy and church workers, the Offences Ordinance 1962 specifies drunkenness as an offence for which a charge may be heard and determined by the Diocesan or Disciplinary Tribunal.

And for clergy, Canon 75 of 1603 relates to the activities and conduct of a minister (including consumption of alcohol) regardless of the premises

### **8. Practical issues for churches**

The conditions attached to a temporary function licence, which is what would be required in order to “sell” alcohol at a church function or ministry event, are quite onerous. These conditions include ensuring that –

- the licensee only sells liquor legally and responsibly,
- every person supplying liquor at the function holds a Responsible Service of Alcohol certificate from an approved training organisation,
- the licensee complies with a cluster of harm minimisation strategies such as –
  - alcohol cannot be supplied by, or supplied to, minors or any person who is intoxicated,
  - alcohol must be served open or in a glass,
  - all unconsumed alcohol must be returned, or held over to a future function (i.e. not distributed to participants in the event),
  - the quiet and good order of the neighbourhood may require provision of crowd controllers, planned patron departure, and special patron transport arrangements,
  - a number of statutory signs must be displayed, and
  - other conditions may also apply including the provision of low alcohol beer and non-alcoholic drinks, chilled drinking water and food.

It may be very difficult for a church’s leaders (ministry staff and wardens as a minimum, but preferably also the parish council) to guarantee that they would be able to maintain compliance with all the conditions of a temporary function licence.

Whilst the legal requirement to obtain a temporary function licence applies where the alcohol is to be “sold”, this requirement does not

apply where the alcohol is provided free of charge, or people are allowed to bring their own alcohol.

However, even if it were legal, it would not be appropriate (ie prudent or morally responsible) for a parish to hold a function or ministry event at which alcohol is available, either free of charge or on a BYO basis, without ensuring that the conditions under which it is provided at least meet the government's minimum requirements for the responsible service of alcohol and related harm minimisation strategies. Clearly we would want to ensure that any church function or ministry event at which alcohol was available at least met the minimum community standards as reflected in current NSW government legislation and Australian government guidelines.

This highlights a significant moral point. A parish should take account of secular law and community expectations as well as church law and recommendations when considering the provision of alcohol at church functions or ministry events. The prevailing mood, and law, in NSW is for very rigorous and professional control of the provision of alcohol in group settings. So, before proceeding to allow alcohol at a church event the parish leadership (minister and parish council) must satisfy themselves that the leadership at the event has the relevant will, experience and organisational ability to provide it in the manner stipulated by the licensing laws and can ensure safe and responsible drinking. If that is not the case, the only responsible course would be for the parish council to determine that there is to be no alcohol at such events.

As part of their response parishes would also need to –

- Recognise the danger alcohol poses for the vulnerable (people under stress and the young in particular).
- Ensure that they are equipped to offer compassion, pastoral care and appropriate support (and no further temptation) for those struggling to overcome an alcohol addiction.
- Acknowledge the validity of choosing a life without alcohol,
- Encourage their leaders in particular to proclaim scriptural truths concerning the use of alcohol and to set a godly example in regards to the personal use of alcohol.

### **9. Recommendation**

Recognising that alcohol is a gift from God to be enjoyed in moderation but also recognising that alcohol abuse has caused significant damage in our community, the minister and parish council of each parish be requested to –

- (a) study the information in the report, and
- (b) determine the parish's own policy on the consumption of alcohol having regard to the following recommendation –

“Except for –

- services of public worship where wine is provided as part of the Lord's Supper,
- private activities in ministry residences, and
- activities undertaken pursuant to a commercial lease of church trust property signed by the Property Trust,

no alcohol should be consumed or made available in the context of any ministry activity of the parish or any private activity held on church trust property, without the approval of the parish council.”

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee  
ARCHDEACON DERYCK HOWELL  
*Chair of the Committee*

14 July 2009

## To drink or not to drink: having others in mind

### A biblical perspective

#### Beverages and Drunkenness in the Scriptures:

The consumption of or abstention from alcoholic beverages has been a point of contention amongst Christians for some time. For this reason, consideration of what the Bible has to say on the matter is given here in more detail than would otherwise be warranted. The term “alcohol” is a modern one and refers to a specific chemical. It is produced naturally when enzymes from yeast cells attached to the outside skin of a fruit, typically grapes, react with sugars in the fruit itself, leading to the formation of a wine. The reaction begins to occur almost immediately upon the grape being crushed. It is also produced naturally when enzymes react with starches found in grains leading to the formation of a beer. The formation of alcohol can be inhibited by the addition of certain substances or by elevated or lowered temperatures. It ceases when the concentration of alcohol reaches a certain point. The alcohol can be removed or its concentration lowered, for example, by boiling the mixture. In the modern world, the concentration of alcohol can be increased by the artificial addition of alcohol.

#### *Old Testament considerations:*

In the Old Testament there are three frequently occurring words that are pertinent to the discussion. They are *tirosh*, *yayin* and *shaykar*, sometimes translated “new wine”, “wine” and “strong drink”, respectively, though these translations can be misleading. The terms are used both literally and metaphorically.

Of its 38 occurrences, *tirosh* occurs predominantly in the context of grain or grain and oil. It is never mentioned in association with drunkenness per se. However, in Judges 9:13 there is a reference to it bringing cheer to gods and men and in Hosea 4:11, it and *yayin* are said to diminish understanding. In Isaiah 65:8 its origin is given as the grape though this may not mean that it is fresh from the grape. It is impossible to be sure but it could be that it is used mainly as a reference to a beverage that has little if any alcohol.

*Yayin* is the most common word of the three and is used in a large variety of contexts. It could be that it mainly refers to types of wine. Of its 140 occurrences, 10 are related to drink offerings, another 10 or so are in the context of abstention and about 70 are in other contexts, where there is no reference to its effects on humans. Of the remaining

50 or so instances, 18 make clear reference to persons being drunk, 3 refer to drinking large quantities, 15 describe marked effects on the drinkers and 13 lesser effects. Clearly, there are no sharp category distinctions and certain judgements are not easily made. In some instances, one of the difficulties is uncertainty in the meaning of the text. The lesser effects include relief from tiredness, merriment, singing, enjoyment and forgetfulness: wine is for those who are exhausted (2 Samuel 16:2); God brings about wine to gladden the heart (Psalm 104:15); under the blessing of God, wine will be drunk with a merry heart (Zechariah 10:7); wine is no longer drunk with singing (Isaiah 24:9); rulers may forget or ignore what they have decreed as a result of drinking wine (Proverbs 31:4, 5). Though it is possible that some of these effects are not due to the presence of alcohol, it is most likely that they are. There are a number of instances where the drinking of *yayin* is associated with a festive occasion - e.g. 1 Chronicles 12:40; Esther 7:2, Job 1:13, and Song of Songs 2:4. More marked effects include: unsteadiness (Psalm 60:3); shouting - the Lord awakes from sleep like a warrior shouting because of wine (Psalm 78:65); violence (Proverbs 4:17); hallucinations (Proverbs 23:33); red eye (Proverbs 23:29); drowning of sorrows (Proverbs 31:7); addiction (Isaiah 5:11); confusion (Isaiah 28:7); sickness (?) (Hosea 7:5). In Jeremiah 13:12 it is used in association with drunkenness, metaphorically, in the context of God's judgment. Although there are many instances of a neutral kind, where no reference is made to any effects, it could be that *yayin* should mainly be understood as a reference to an alcoholic beverage. That for some people abstinence was to apply indicates some concern over the effects of *yayin* and some contexts clearly point to some behaviour associated with drinking it as inappropriate. A sense of caution with respect to the consumption of such wine is pervasive.

The word *shaykar* might be used to refer to types of beer. Of its 23 instances, almost half are in contexts where the "strong drink" has had some effect on the drinker. There are 2 references to persons specifically identified as drunk, 1 to the drinking of large quantities, 6 where the person is heavily affected and 3 where persons are less affected. Of the remaining 11 instances, 6 relate to abstinence, 1 to a drink offering and 4 others have no reference to its effects on humans. In all but 2 instances it is associated with *yayin*. Examples of lesser effects include: the drink tasting bitter (Isaiah 24:9); drinkers singing (Psalm 69:12). Examples of greater effects include: addiction (Proverbs 31:4); violence (Proverbs 20:1); unsteadiness (Isaiah 28:7). Hebrew words related to *shaykar* almost invariably refer to drunkenness or being drunk. Abstinence features here even more than in the case of *yayin*. Taking such instances into account, the dominant feature of *shaykar* is its effects on the drinker, some of which are deemed to be inappropriate. There are undercurrents that the drinking of *shaykaris* to be approached with extreme caution.

The loss of understanding due to *yayin* and *shaykar* in Hosea 4:11 is associated with Israel's idolatry and sexual immorality. In the context of being drunk, both are used metaphorically in Isaiah 29:9 with reference to the judgement of God upon his people. However, other usages are somewhat positive. Though Israel has not drunk *yayin* or *shaykar* while journeying in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 29:6), provision is made for a later occasion for the purchase of *yayin* or *shaykar* under certain circumstances (Deuteronomy 14:26). A daily drink offering to God is to be of *shaykar* (Numbers 28:7).

One of the rarer references to an alcoholic beverage is the Hebrew word *shemer*. Its prime reference is to sediment and is sometimes translated "aged wine" as in Isaiah 25:6. The setting there is that of an eschatological banquet and the wine is undoubtedly alcoholic with the fermentation process having come to completion. Its usage in Psalm 75:8 is in the context of God's judgement on the wicked.

There appears to be little point in arguing that some wine was fermented and some was not or that in the case of the fermented wine the alcoholic content was less than it sometimes is today. Often, the text does not allow us to make judgments on the former matter and whatever might be said regarding the latter, people still became drunk. One could surmise why drunkenness and loss of self-control in a drunken state are inappropriate and in doing so might appeal to the notion of mankind being created in the image of God. It is sufficient however for Scripture simply to indicate its judgement.

In summary, while drunkenness and certain behaviours associated with the consumption of alcoholic beverages are treated in the Old Testament as inappropriate for mankind, there is no blanket commandment from God for such beverages not to be drunk. Nor is there a sharp division between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in terms of associated behaviour.

*New Testament considerations:*

In the New Testament, the word *oinos*, is the main one to be considered. Of the 31 instances, 18 occur in the gospels. The Synoptic gospels contain 8 instances relating to the parable about old and new wine skins, 2 relate to the soporific drink offered to Jesus during the crucifixion, 2 concern the abstinence of John the Baptist, and the parable of the "Impossibly" Good Samaritan contains 1 instance. The other 5 occurrences all relate to the wedding feast held at Cana of Galilee - obviously a festive occasion. There is no good reason not to assume that most instances relate to fermented wine although the reference to "new wine" in the parable about the old and new wine skins might suggest that the wine to begin with is unfermented. The bursting of the wineskins referred to in the parable is probably due to the fermentation process (cf. Job 32:19 where Job's heart, like wine that has no vent, is ready to burst). Note should also be made of the references to the eschatological banquet (e.g. Luke 13:29; 14:15 and

probably Matthew 26:29) where “good” wine being served would be part of the imagery conveyed.

In the other writings of the New Testament there are 3 instances that are neutral in that there is no mention of any effects of the beverage (Romans 14:21, Revelation 6:6; 18:13) and 1 instance where its effects are regarded as beneficial (1 Timothy 5:23). Overindulgence or perhaps addiction is spoken of, in negative terms, twice (1 Timothy 3:8 [deacons]; Titus 2:3 [older women]). The remaining 7 occurrences relate to drunkenness. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul instructs the readers not to be drunk with wine for this is debauchery. There are 3 instances in Revelation where wine, drunkenness and sexual impurity, are related metaphorically to the effect of “Babylon” on the nations. Another 3 occurrences in Revelation associate wine and by implication drunkenness with the fury of God’s anger. Almost all instances, other than those of a neutral kind, clearly relate to fermented drink.

There are two other words, each used once in the New Testament, that are relevant. John the Baptist not only abstains from *oinos* but also from *sikera*, translated “strong drink” (Luke 1:15). Those assembled on the day of Pentecost were considered to be drunk with *glucos*, translated “new wine” (Acts 2:13). Both could be terms that in general refer to fermented beverages.

Paul speaks negatively about drunkenness in 1 Thessalonians 5:7. He warns against becoming drunk, (see Ephesians 5:18 above), and associating with drunkards (1 Corinthians 5:11). In the last passage, drunkards are cited along with the sexually immoral, the greedy, swindlers and idolaters. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 they are referred to alongside the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, slanderers and swindlers as those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Those who have oversight are not to be drunkards (or not to make a regular habit of drinking?) (Titus 1:7). That Jesus is referred to as a wine drinker and a glutton (Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34) is not to be understood as implying that he was but rather as indicative of an attempt to slander him because of his association with “tax collectors and sinners”. The text however confirms that by implication, habitual, perhaps also meaning addictive, wine drinking was regarded with distaste.

As with the Old Testament, although there is no commandment from God not to drink fermented beverages, there are warnings against overindulgence, and drunkenness is portrayed in very serious terms. Opposition to drunkenness is pronounced.

#### **Concern for the Believer:**

When considering our behaviour with respect to alcohol and its effect on others, appeal is often made to what is termed - “the weaker brother principle.” The passages people have in mind are Romans 14:1 - 15:6 and 1 Corinthians 8:1 - 13.

*Romans 14:1 - 15:6*

Here Paul is concerned with how people with two different attitudes towards eating and drinking certain substances and the keeping of special days are to relate to each other. Wine receives a special mention in v. 21 but that might only be because Paul earlier mentions “drink” in v. 17 in describing what the kingdom of God is and what it is not. Apart from the references to special days, the focus is upon eating food. Whatever the case, by adding “or anything that makes your brother stumble” at v. 21, he allows for no exceptions. With respect to food, the problem seems to centre on whether or not the food is considered ceremonially unclean. Though Paul is persuaded that nothing is unclean in itself he recognises that it is unclean for those who think it is unclean (v. 14).

Paul begins by directing that the brother who is weak in faith should be embraced but not in order to engage him in argument. (In identifying some as the weak in faith and others who are not so, Paul’s comments could however be considered educative.) The weak in faith, later simply referred to as the weak (15:1), are identified as those who have restrictive food practices. Brothers are not to be condescending or despise other brothers (the latter probably being the weak). Brothers are not to be judgmental of other brothers (the latter probably being those who are not weak). The division most likely runs along Jewish and Gentile lines, though not necessarily precisely so. Different brothers will have different perspectives on what is appropriate before God, but all are to be convinced in their own minds as to what is right. All live “to the Lord”. However, the responsibilities that they have towards one another are not symmetrical. Special concern is to be exercised by those not weak in the faith, later identified as the strong (15:1), towards those who are. The first reference to not creating those situations whereby a brother stumbles could be understood as an injunction to both weak and strong (v. 13). However, later it is clear that it is the stumbling of the weak that is of paramount importance (v. 21). Those who eat certain foods are to be concerned about causing injury to those who do not eat them. They must not let what they eat cause the ruin of another for whom Christ died (v. 15). The work of God must not be destroyed by what people eat (v. 20). The words, “injury”, “ruin”, “destroyed”, “the work of God” and the reference to “for whom Christ died” indicate how serious the matter is. The situation seems to be that of the weak brother viewing the eating of certain foods as seriously affecting his relationship with God. Most likely this has been his thinking for much of his life and is well ingrained into his behaviour. He would have sincere doubts about the propriety of eating such foods and would be conscience stricken if he did eat them. However the behaviour of others who have no such scruples influences him considerably. Succumbing to the pressure of what the strong does, and eating food that for him is prohibitive puts his relationship with God in extreme jeopardy, although Paul in his great concern for the welfare

of the believer expresses the danger in absolute terms. He has not acted out of faith. He has sinned and is condemned (v. 23).

Given the seriousness of the situation, the strong must behave otherwise. Acting out of love, they are to bear with the failings of the weak. They are not to focus on pleasing themselves but rather pleasing their neighbour for his good (15:1, 2). The loving thing to do is to abstain from anything that will cause such a brother to stumble - his relationship with God seriously undermined - a stumbling leading, in Paul's absolute terms, to injury, ruin and destruction. They are to focus on those things that bring about peace and Godly development (v. 19).

An appeal to "the weaker brother principle", if in conformity with the passage from Romans would need to be based on the understanding that the weak brother was weak in faith, that the weak brother might stumble and be destroyed if he acts contrary to his faith. Paul's argument would not strictly seem to apply where a person's faith and so one's relationship with God, was not intimately bound up with their concerns about the drinking of alcoholic beverages. However, Paul's general concern about not bringing harm to a brother, only acting out of love towards a brother, bearing with the failings of others and not pleasing oneself, would still apply.

*1 Corinthians 8:1 - 13*

1 Corinthians 8:1 - 13 is also concerned with matters of faith but in a different context to that of Romans 14:1 - 15:6. Here it is a matter of eating food that had been offered to idols. (Meat seems to be the main item of food in mind.) Paul writes of those brothers previously involved in idol worship who are unable to dissociate the food that has been offered to idols from the idols themselves. They are weak and their consciences are weak. Upon eating such food their consciences are defiled. Perhaps, having been only recently converted, and having lived so much of their lives in the pagan world of idolatry, their consciences are extremely sensitive to knowingly eating such food. In chapter 10, where Paul seems to conclude his argument, he contends that no brother (not only the weak) should knowingly eat food offered to idols in any setting, for idols are associated with the demonic world, the world of spirits. Eating and drinking food offered to idols is eating and drinking at a table of demons. He introduces the subject in chapter 8. In chapter 9 he gives examples of his personal restraint in a variety of circumstances, even though an apostle, and urges the Corinthians to follow his example. In the early part of chapter 10 he issues warnings from Israel's history and demands that they have no part in idolatry whatsoever. In understanding some aspects of these passages we should probably recognise that Paul inserts into the text certain perspectives adopted by the non-weak Corinthians to which Paul has a counter position. Furthermore, a number of Paul's statements, such as

those referring to the Corinthian's knowledge, seem to be tinged with irony or sarcasm.

The specific situation Paul addresses in chapter 8 is that of the weak brother seeing another brother eating in an idol's temple, probably in a dining room attached to a temple, but perhaps also within a pagan temple itself. Though an idol has no existence and the food is only food (perhaps quoting the very words used by those Corinthians claiming to be knowledgeable), the weak are not able to view matters so simply. They are not able to rid themselves of the thought that the food has been offered to idols and so eating it results in their being infected with the idolatrous beliefs associated with idol worship. However, emboldened by the behaviour of those so-called knowledgeable ones who eat in the idol's temple or its precincts, the weak do likewise. Another contributing factor to the behaviour of the weak, not at all helped by the practices of the "knowledgeable", may be the pressures to conform, for social and other reasons, to the behaviour of their pagan relatives, friends and others. Upon eating sacrificial food the conscience of the weak brother is injured with his destruction a genuine possibility, though Paul speaks of his destruction in more absolute terms. Although in this passage Paul does not specifically refer to "faith", it is the weak brother's faith that is in danger of being dismantled, perhaps fatally so. The stumbling referred to is to be viewed with the greatest alarm.

As with the passage in Romans, the matter is exceedingly serious. If the strong do not behave differently, the weak brother's relationship with God will be seriously endangered. The brother for whom Christ died could even be destroyed. Where a brother has exercised his freedom and utilised his so-called "knowledge" to the endangerment of a fellow brother he has sinned against that brother and consequently against Christ. At this point in his argument, Paul, almost certainly in hyperbolic fashion, exclaims that he will never eat meat (without referring to its source) if it causes his brother to stumble and fall. However, it does not appear that he has made for himself such a general rule at this point in time. He seems to be saying something like, "If it really came to the worst I would adopt this principle."

However, in similar vein to the comment on the passage from Romans, if danger to a believer's relationship with God is not intimately associated with the drinking of alcoholic beverages then this passage does not strictly apply. Nonetheless, certain considerations do. Underlying Paul's concern for the weak is his clear understanding that while knowledge may bring about arrogance, love builds.

Unless the consumption of alcoholic liquor by a believer or his attitude towards it is understood to place the faith of other believers and their relationship with God in jeopardy, then a prohibition against the practice cannot strictly be justified by appeal to either of the above passages. However, under God, love for the brethren must come to

bear upon both one's attitudes and behaviour. Although it might not bear directly on matters of faith, if a brother, newly converted from a grossly immoral life, were to observe another brother drinking in a precinct where gross sinful behaviour also takes place then the brother drinking in that place has not acted out of consideration for the welfare of the newly converted brother. Nor presumably, has he considered, independently of the direct effect of his own behaviour, the general social and other pressures that, if succumbed to, might cause that brother considerable harm. Certainly the situation would more directly relate to matters of that brother's faith and thus his relationship with God, if the drinking place were associated with, for example, the more overt cursing of God and anti-Christian sentiment. In certain situations concern for a brother's spiritual welfare could lead to a decision not to consume, make available or even demonstrate positive attitudes towards the consumption or supply of, alcoholic liquor. Certainly, neither passage applies where there is simply a disagreement between believers over whether or not alcoholic beverages should be consumed.

**Concern for the unbeliever:**

Coming to his final word on knowingly eating meat offered to idols Paul makes a comment about a believer being invited to a meal as a guest of an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 10:27 - 11:1). If the host or anyone for that matter reveals that some of the food presented has been offered to idols, then Paul firmly instructs that it should not be eaten. Paul makes it clear that this is for the sake of the "conscience" of whoever has raised the issue, be that unbeliever or another believer. It might be that the host, if the host has made reference to the matter, sensitive to the beliefs of the believer, raises the issue so that the believer will act with knowledge. A situation where a host maliciously wishes to create a problem is also a possibility. Not partaking of food offered by a host could readily be viewed as an anti-social and unfriendly act. However, once it has been established that the food has previously been offered to idols, consuming it might well lead to mental disturbance of a moral kind for any unbeliever present and for any weak brother present. Paul does not reiterate his previous strong stand against idolatry in the context under discussion, so perhaps what is uppermost in Paul's mind is the effect upon the unbeliever of a believer consuming such food. What could well concern Paul here is the possibility of the unbeliever coming to the wrong conclusions concerning idolatry - a very serious affair. He does not want Jews or Greeks as well as the Church of God to be led astray. The main focus here may be on people's prospective faith and their understanding of the faith. Paul claims to aim to please everybody in everything he does, seeking not his own good but the good of many, so that they might be saved.

Earlier he writes, "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law, so as to win

those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law, so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men, so that by all possible means I might save some." (I Cor. 9:20 - 22). (He may refer to the "weak" in part, to show his concern for the weak identified as such in chapter 8.) The unbeliever coming to faith determines his strategy. Though his concern in the latter part of chapter 10 is with a prohibition, for the sake of the conscience of the unbeliever, or believer, it is arguable, that his desire for the unbeliever to be won to the faith might in other circumstances lead to a liberality of action. By implication, for example, if unbelievers saw a prohibition against alcohol at a function organised by believers applied for apparently no good reason, and if consequently this inhibited their desire to listen to a proclamation of the gospel, those holding the function might decide not to implement any such prohibition. Creating a relaxed and friendly social setting that is conducive to attending to gospel truths might be a major consideration rather than an unthinkingly applied no alcohol policy. On the other hand, if circumstances were such that the consumption of alcoholic beverages or one's attitudes towards the drinking of alcohol were interpreted by unbelievers in such a way as to hinder their coming to faith then such a policy might be applied. In some situations, making a decision either way might not be a simple matter. Whether one eats or drinks it should however be done to the glory of God (v. 31).

Unless the consumption of alcoholic liquor by believers is such that it is judged that it is very likely to hinder unbelievers coming to faith, or likely to lead to serious injury of the faith of a believer, then a prohibition could not easily be justified by appeal to the latter part of chapter 10. What should predominate at all times however is the desire that as many as possible be recipients of the salvation of God. It is clear for Paul, who becomes as one who is not under law in certain circumstances but as one who is under law in others etc. (9:20 - 22), that no overarching principle applied in certain matters, other than his desire to win many.

Believers however are to be conscious of how their behaviour is viewed by others at a more general level than that directly impinging on the unbelievers' understanding of the faith, although their understanding of spiritual realities and their need to come to faith are matters of ultimate concern. Appearing in public law courts, one believer against another, this being in front of unbelievers, should be avoided if the matter can be solved, internally (1 Corinthians 6:1 - 8). Believers should "be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody" (Romans 12:17). Young widows are to behave in such a way that the enemy (Satan?) will have no opportunity to slander (I Timothy 5:14). Younger women should learn to behave in such a way "that no-one will malign the word of God" and Titus is to provide young men with such an example on how to live that those who oppose him

“may be ashamed ... (having) “nothing bad to say” about Titus and those associated with him (Titus 2:5, 8). Having a clear conscience means “that those who speak maliciously against good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 Peter 3:16). An overseer must “have a good reputation with outsiders” (1 Tim. 3:7).

The messages are clear. Believers must behave so that the unbeliever is not able to fault them. This does not mean that the believer’s behaviour is determined by what the unbeliever deems to be appropriate but where this is in conformity with the will of God, there is simply no problem. It is sometimes the case, however, even with respect to not becoming drunk that the unbeliever may judge the believer harshly. In fact, the outsider may heap abuse on believers because they do not live in “debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry, as they formally did” (1 Peter 4:3, 4). The concern that believers have or should have with respect to the many significant problems associated with alcohol consumption in our society should become obvious to others. If this were not to occur then understandably the unbelieving world could, and in some instances would, condemn believers for their apparent or real lack of concern. With little public knowledge of the concern held by believers over matters associated with alcohol consumption, misunderstanding of the gospel and a general lack of interest in the gospel could result, hindering people coming to faith.

Indeed, the believer has an obligation to care for others, whether unbelievers or believers. To love one’s neighbour as oneself is the second of the two great commandments (Mark 12:31). People affected by alcohol abuse, resulting in alcohol dependency, physical, emotional and mental ailments, economic deprivation, physical and mental violence, loss of self esteem, social deprivation and so on are to be the recipients of that love about which God has commanded. This same love will endeavour to reduce and not to add to such suffering. In arranging any function where alcohol may be consumed, believers would presumably monitor the situation to minimise the likelihood of people consuming more than would be appropriate. Under certain circumstances out of concern for those present, or where one had little knowledge about some of those likely to be present, a no alcohol policy might be implemented.

#### **Freedom and the Believer:**

In some of the passages quoted above, Paul mentions the matter of freedom but not to emphasise it. Perhaps quoting the Corinthian’s position, he states, “We are no worse if we do not eat and no better if we do” but then instructs, perhaps by way of a modifying statement, that the Corinthians must be careful that such freedom does not “become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Corinthians 8:8, 9). His point seems to be that while there is this knowledge, it would not hurt if food offered to idols were never eaten. This is part of that foundation

that will enable him more strongly later to claim that food knowingly offered to idols should never be eaten. He does recognise that there is a liberty but it is in terms of how that liberty should not be used. It should not cause the weak to stumble, leading to their faith being placed in jeopardy or worse. True, it is important that people be convinced in their own minds about the rightness of what they do before the Lord (Romans 14:5, 6). Yet, though “no food is unclean in itself” believers are “not (to) allow what (they) consider good to be spoken of as evil” (Romans 14:14, 16). Rather believers are to pursue those things that create peace and lead to mutual development (Romans 14:19). Again, as referred to above, Paul argues that though he is free from all men, he has made himself a slave to all, that he might win the more (1 Corinthians 9:19). He does not see himself bound to conform to the social and religious customs or demands of others but he is bound to serve all. He contends that his concern to win people over to the truth of the gospel dictates how he lives. He becomes as one who is under law, when with those who are under law, even though he himself is not under law (1 Corinthians 9:20). He has an inherent freedom, no matter what his circumstances but he does not make it the basis of his behaviour. There is a freedom in Christ (John 8:34 - 36) a freedom from the slavery of sin and its consequences. “For freedom Christ has set us free” where once we might have been subject to the slavery of the law. And believers are not to burden themselves again by “a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). It is undeniable that believers have been called to freedom but they must not interpret that to mean that they can live according to their sinful desires. Rather they should be operating as the slaves of one another in the spirit of love for one another (Galatians 5:13). The danger is that sometimes, believers may be tempted to emphasise their freedom at the expense of their concern for one another. However, for believers, such concern is to override that genuine freedom from regulations, while not becoming enslaved to that which becomes a denial of the gospel.

**Summary:**

The Scriptures treat drunkenness and the situations that arise because of drunkenness as abhorrent. There is however no blanket rule from God that would forbid the consumption of alcoholic drinks. The Scriptures do not seem to be opposed to the enjoyment that might come from the consumption of alcoholic beverages, though considerable caution is to be exercised. While care for others, both believers and unbelievers, should in many circumstances determine our practice, such a principle does not directly stem from the “weaker brother” passages, unless the serious matter of the faith of another brother or sister is at risk. However, what underlies these passages is the imperative to act under God out of love and the proper burden of wanting to save many. By implication, this might mean that in some circumstances there should be a no alcohol policy but that in other

situations no such policy should be applied. What the unbeliever thinks of the practice of believers does matter and should be born in mind when believers consider how they behave. Believers are in fact obligated by God to love their neighbour and this will include those suffering either directly or indirectly as a result of alcohol dependency and abuse. To love others will mean seeking to lessen such suffering. While believers must not be enslaved to regulations that are not inherent in the gospel and while being in Christ means the enjoyment of an unimaginable freedom from such, a concern for their brothers and sisters and others must be paramount in determining their behaviour.